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Title: Washo Religion

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Release Date: February 27, 2010 [Ebook #31429]

Language: English

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Washo Religion

By

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University of California Publications

Anthropological Records

Vol. 16, No. 9, pp. 365-386

Editors (Berkeley): J. H. Rowe, R. F. Millon, D. M. Schneider

Submitted by editors September 16, 1960

Issued June 16, 1961

Price, 75 cents

University of California Press

Berkeley and Los Angeles

California

Cambridge University Press

London, England

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Preface

This paper is the result of two and one-half months' field work among the Washo Indians of California and Nevada supported by the Department of Anthropology of the University of California and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. In it I have tried to describe the religious beliefs and ritual activities of the Washo as they can be examined today. Where possible I have attempted to reconstruct the aboriginal patterns and trace the course of change between these two points in time.

A second purpose has been to supplement the culture element distribution lists prepared by Omer C. Stewart in 1936 (Stewart 1941). In a number of instances his findings were at variance with those of Smith, whose notes Stewart incorporated; I have been able to resolve some of the differences between Stewart and Smith. Where my own research has led me to disagree with the statements in the culture element distributions I have discussed the problem. In general my own work simply

expands the rather sparse descriptions of the element lists (Stewart 1941, pp. 366-418). The culture element distribution list numbers which refer to traits dealt with in the various sections are indicated in parentheses following the headings. Where a trait or complex is dealt with in detail it is indicated by parentheses in the text. Statements not otherwise attributed are the result of my own field work.

I am indebted to Mr. W. L. d'Azevedo, who encouraged me to carry on field work among the Washo and who has made his own field notes and knowledge available to me. I have indicated information attributable to d'Azevedo by placing his name in parentheses in the text; where his name appears with a date, the reference is to a work published by him.

I also wish to express my thanks for the suggestions made by J. H. Rowe, R. F. Millon, and D. M. Schneider, who read this article before it went to press, and to acknowledge the final reading given the manuscript by the late A. L. Kroeber.

In addition, my thanks are owed to Mr. Frank Yapparagari, Mrs. Juanita Schubert, and Mrs. Lois Buck of Gardnerville and Minden, Nevada, to Mr. Richard Shulter of the Nevada State Museum in Carson City, Nevada, and to Mrs. E. M. Keenan of Paradise, California, who assisted in various ways in the progress of the investigation. Last, to the various members of the Washo tribe, who with patience and good humor bore the probing into their lives, my deepest gratitude.

James F. Downs

Introduction

This paper will devote itself to a description of the religious life of the Washo Indians living in the communities of Sierraville, Loyalton, and Woodfords, in California, and Reno, Carson City, and Dresslerville, Nevada. Smaller numbers are scattered throughout the area which was their aboriginal range, roughly from the southern end of Honey Lake to Antelope Valley and from the divide of the Pinenut Range in Nevada, almost to Placerville, California.

A short ethnography by Barrett dealing in large part with material culture, Lowie's Ethnographic Notes, and Stewart's Element Lists constitute almost the only general references on Washo culture. Various other writers have dealt with specialized questions such as linguistics (Kroeber, Jacobson), peyotism (Siskin, d'Azevedo), and music (Merriam).

Most of the statements about the Washo give the impression that they have long been on the edge of oblivion (Mooney, Kroeber, etc.), and population estimates have been well under one thousand for the past fifty years. However, I find myself in agreement with d'Azevedo[1] that the Washo are a vigorous and continuing cultural entity. My own rather impressionistic estimate of population is that there are perhaps two thousand Indians in the area who consider themselves as Washo and form a part of a viable cultural unit.

My own field work was devoted to an attempt to trace the patterns of change among these people since the entrance of the white man into their area. To this end I spent a great deal of time with older informants, but my work was not exclusively "salvage ethnography." Many aspects of Washo culture have changed dramatically in the past century; this is particularly true in the area of material culture and subsistence activities. On the other hand, I was impressed by the tenacity of the less material aspects of the culture. The always-difficult-to-define world view or ethos of the Washo, which so clearly separates them from other cultures, is very much an entity expressed in the attitudes and actions of the Washo Indians, whether they are oldsters who can remember many aspects of the "old days" or children who have not yet entered the newly integrated schools of Nevada. This continuity seems most clearly expressed in the area which we subsume under the title "Religion." Almost all Washo, even the youngsters, are familiar with, or at least aware of, Washo mythology, attitudes about ghosts, spirits, medicine, and a number of ritual actions and beliefs which are common elements in Washo life today.

This is not to imply that Washo religious activity has not been affected by the tremendous changes which have taken place in western Nevada and eastern California. I suggest that rather than disappearing under the withering rationalism of civilization the religion of the Washo has simply altered and expanded to serve the Washo in new situations.

In this work I take the broadest possible definition of religion, conceiving it as any institutionalized activity or attitude which reflects the Washo view of the cosmos. In so doing I have included a number of categories which may not generally be considered suitable for inclusion under the heading of religion. Stewart, for instance, includes shamanism, curing, special powers of shamans, miscellaneous shamanistic information, guardian spirits, destiny of the soul, ghosts or soul, and jimsonweed. My

own work includes some of these specifically, incorporates some under other headings, and treats a number of subjects not included in the list given above.

The reason for this approach is practical rather than theoretical or philosophical. As anthropological definitions of religions are extremely varied and the activities described as religious under various definitions cover a greater or narrower range, it seems valuable to include as many activities as possible in a purely descriptive work.

The goal of this paper is to make as much information as possible about the religious and ritual activities of the Washo available to scholars who may be interested in religion. The inclusion of as many fields of activity as possible permits them to select information which they feel pertinent to their interests.

Wherever possible I have tried to include direct quotations from informants as well as information about their behavior and attitudes, so that my own interpretations and conclusions can be examined by others in light of the information on which they are based.

Statements made by informants are indicated by quotation marks. I did not have a recording device available and did not attempt to record entire interviews verbatim. However, whenever informants indicated that they considered their statements important I took them down word for word. If I felt some passing remark to have significance, I asked the informant to repeat it and often read it back to him for verification. Other stories, particularly those of a mythological nature, or semilegends, or experiences which were important to individual informants, were repeated voluntarily on almost every occasion of our meeting. Whenever statements are presented in quotation marks the material was gathered in this manner.

This paper contains material from a number of sources. Statements of fact or interpretations taken from published anthropological or historic works are indicated by citations in the customary manner. Information based on conversations or other private communications with other investigators is so designated. All statements of fact which are not credited to these two sources are taken from my own field notes and represent statements of my informants.

[pg 366]

Mythology

Washo mythology has been presented in the form of interlinear texts by Dangberg (1927) and in Lowie's Ethnographic Notes (1939, pp. 333-351). There are two versions of the creation myth, one describing the creation of Paiute, Washo, and Diggers from the seeds of the cattail by the Creator Woman, and the second attributing the creation of Indians to the Creation Man, who formed the three groups from among his sons to keep them from quarreling. Lowie also reports the common theme of several previous inhabitations of the earth. The most important myth, or at least the one which is still

commonly told and seems to be the favorite among the Washo, devotes itself to the adventures of Damalali (short-tailed weasel) and Pewetseli (long-tailed weasel). These heroes are responsible for many of the natural features of the region so references to this myth are rather frequent. The Coyote, in the form of a rather malevolent and stupid trickster, and the Wolf, a generally patriarchal and protective figure, appear in several myths, as do cannibalistic giants and a giant bird, the an.

Figures which appear only incidentally in the myths as recounted are elaborated almost infinitely in what might best be termed folk fantasy.

Water Babies

Most prominent of these figures are the Water Babies (Stewart 1941, p. 444, 2574). In the mythology, Water Baby figures as the creature responsible for the many lakes of the eastern Sierra. Killed and scalped by the rascally Damalali, Water Baby commands the waters of the area to rise until the weasel returns the scalp to avoid drowning. The waters left in mountain valleys as the flood receded formed the lakes.

The Water Baby is not confined to mythology. My informants were able to describe the appearance of a Water Baby in detail, to supply me with population figures, and to recount an almost endless series of incidents in which Water Babies were involved.

All informants agreed that the Water Baby is a creature about one and one-half feet tall, gray in color, with extremely long black hair which never touches the

ground but which floats along behind the Water Babies when they walk. In general, these creatures look like small humans. However, they are boneless, cold to the touch, and damp.

Between two and three thousand Water Babies live in the Sierra, according to one informant. They inhabit lakes, streams, marshes, ponds, springs, and irrigation ditches. They speak a language of their own but are always able to speak Washo. With a single exception, every Washo of middle age and over to whom I talked claimed to have at least heard Water Babies calling from some body of water in the night. Several others claimed to have seen Water Baby footprints (one even reporting that the footprints he had seen were those of a female because the tracks were clearly those of high heeled shoes!). One informant steadfastly claimed to have seen a Water Baby, at least fleetingly, in 1956.

Two distinct attitudes about these creatures are displayed by the Washo. Most informants openly admitted being afraid of Water Babies. If they heard one they remained in their houses or attempted to avoid contact. They claimed that if a person saw a Water Baby by accident, at the very least he would be struck unconscious and greater harm, in the form of sickness, might be inflicted on him or on one of his relatives. The general attitude was that Water Babies were best left alone because they were extremely powerful.

This attitude is perhaps summed up best by one of my informants, a rather sophisticated Washo who has lived in cities for long periods and who is an active leader in the tribe's legal battle with the federal government. He is also a devoted peyotist who often conducts curing ceremonies and is conceded to have a curing power. He said, “If they ever get up a bunch to trap one of them [Water Babies], I don't want to have nothing to do with it.” When I asked why not, he replied: “Why hell, if you make one of them things mad they'll flood the world. I just don't want

nothing to do with them. I ain't that desperate." I asked, "desperate for what?" and he replied "for power. I like to dream about womens [sic] and things like that, not about Water Babies and that funny stuff."

This last statement clearly indicates the other attitude about Water Babies; they are often guardian spirits of Washo who have special power, particularly shamanistic curing power. Another informant expressed this other attitude about these creatures. He is about seventy, attended Stewart Indian School for ten years and lived among the Hopi for ten years. He boasts a stone and cement-block home, the only such dwelling owned by a Washo. He has learned to bead baskets and during most of the year earns a reasonable income from this. His seeming adjustment to white culture is confounded when his philosophic position is examined. He can only be termed a mystic who interprets the world in Indian terms. Exposure to such influences as the writings of Kroeber and Huxley has only confirmed his essentially Indian viewpoint. Both his parents were famous Indian doctors and his maternal uncle, who was also his mentor,[2] was a famous shaman. My informant implied that his uncle's spirit (wegeleyo), from which his power was derived, was the Water Baby, and his own carefully guarded statement implied that the creature was potentially his own spirit. His view of the Water Baby was quite the reverse of other informants. "Some people think the Water Baby will hurt them, but he won't. If they see him by accident he won't do nothing. But if he has given you his power and you see him—then wham, he maybe knock you right down." This appears to have been his way of describing a seizure by the Water Baby, which although a fearful experience, usually resulted in the gift of additional power. There was, however, [pg 367] general agreement among informants that the Water Baby could, if he gave his power to a person, demand repayment with the lives of his protégé's close relatives or entire family.[3]

The various powers and activities of the Water Babies are

perhaps best described in the following stories recounted by informants:

1. “One time my Dad was sick. He called in two, three doctors and they said he had to give a basket to the Water Babies at Lake *Išmedel*. There is an island in this lake and my Dad was supposed to go out to that island and leave a basket. I was too young then but he took my brother. They went up there and my Dad just started walking out to the lake and the water never got any deeper than there (pointing to his knees). He walked right on that water. He left that basket and came back and he got well. Them Water Babies helped him walk on the water. My brother saw it happen.”

2. “There is this deep pool up in the mountains. There is a kind of black sucker live there but no Indians ever caught them because that was a Water Baby place and they was Water Baby food. Womens used to sit on a platform of logs and weave baskets there [special baskets for the Water Babies, apparently, such as the one used as offering in the story above]. One time I took another fella like you [anthropologist] up there but when we got there we couldn't find nothing but sand with a little water bubbling up in the middle. He wouldn't believe me. I showed him where them womens had sat but I think he thought I was lying. I guess them Water Babies did something.”

3. “There is this women called Frances. She was up at Blue Lake with her husband following him along the edge of the lake. It was kind of dark. She saw them little footprints right on top of her husband's in the sand.”

4. “I'll tell you what happened to me right in this house about two years ago. I was in bed

> in that room there and I felt these little hands creeping under the covers. I brushed 'em away but they just come back. They tried to feel me down here [indicating his genitalia]. I yelled for my mother and she come in and said something and something went zip (waving arm violently to indicate direction) right out of that window. We looked out that way [to the south], that's toward Walker Lake. Everything was kind of hazy blue."

In light of Washo views about receiving shamanistic power, it would appear that my informant was suggesting that this visitation was a Water Baby making its patronage known.

> 5. "My old uncle had been doctoring up by Genoa. He had a tough one and fallen in the fire and burned all his pants off and was walking wearing his coat like a skirt. He got by Wally's Hot Springs when he felt like he wanted a bath. Them Water Babies must have been working on him. He went over by the creek and started to lean over and then he passed out and fell into the water and there was a Water Baby. That Water Baby said, 'come on,' and he took him down to Water Baby country. The chief of the Water Babies lived in a big house made out of that black shining rock [obsidian]. But they didn't go there. The Water Baby said 'we got some girls that want to give you something,' and he took my uncle to a place and there was five girls there. They all sat around my uncle and sang him a song and told him that it was his song from now on. Then the Water Baby took my uncle back and then he said it was like waking up from a dream and there he was laying in the creek down under a bunch of cattails."[4]

> 6. "There was this white man up here fishing. He caught a Water Baby but he didn't know

> what it was. He thought it was some kind of fish and took it to San Francisco and they put it that place where they have a lotta fish [aquarium]. Captain Jim went all the way down there to tell the mayor that they had better let that Water Baby loose, but nobody would pay no attention to him. Well you know they had a big earthquake down there and the water came up around everything. When it was all over that tank where they had the Water Baby was empty."

The Giants

Washo mythology features several creatures which may each have contributed to the wild men I will describe in this section. Both Lowie and Dangberg report myths in which a giant, Hangawuiwui, is the principal figure. Although the myths do not describe him, my informants generally picture him as a colossus who hops on a single leg from the top of one mountain to another. He has a single eye to match his single limb and a proclivity for gobbling up Indians. Several miles southwest of Gardnerville, in the hills overlooking Double Spring Flats, a cave is known by the Washo as Hangawuiwui aɲ¿l (the place where Hangawuiwui lives). Present-day Indians tell a number of stories about this giant and display a certain uneasiness when they are near places he is supposed to haunt.

Another kind of giant appears in a myth reported by Lowie. These beings appear to be considerably more human than Hangawuiwui. Traditionally they camped south of Pyramid Lake and terrorized the Paiutes. However, when one of their number attempted to take

fish from a Washo the tribe rallied and routed the giants in a battle near Walker Lake. The giants did not have bows and arrows. They fortified themselves behind rock walls and threw stones.

According to my informant on the subject, the mountains are still the home of a tribe of “wild men.” These people have managed to hide the location of their camps so that no one knows where they live. My informant felt that they were in fact some kind of Indian. Despite the mythological ability of the Washo to defeat the giants, modern stories about them suggest they have a great deal of supernatural power in addition to their physical prowess.

The following stories were told to me as contemporary or relatively recent occurrences:

> 1. “There is these wild fellas up in the mountains. I guess you call them giants. One time there was an old man who had set up a blind to hunt chipmunks, [pg 368]like I told you yesterday. He was up in the pine-nut hills and he had killed four chipmunks. One of these fellas come along and he snatched up a chipmunk and he ate it. Then he snatched another and ate it. He tried to grab another but the old man wrestled with him and stopped him from getting the chipmunk and then he got away. He tussled with that wild man and got away. But a long time after when he was real old and went around with a long stick [staff], he went out walking and he didn't come back. They went out looking for him and found his tracks leading up the foot of Job's Peak and they ended there. His stick was stuck in the ground and at the end of his tracks it looked like something had snatched him up.”

When I asked if the wild men had gotten him my

informant said he thought so. The theme of a wild man's attempting to take part of a catch from a Washo recalls the myth as reported by Lowie, although in the version he recorded the incident occurred between Wadsworth and Sparks and the final battle took place at Walker Lake, whereas my informant changed the locale to the Carson Valley area.

> 2. “My old grandfather had this happen to him. He was hunting up by the Lake [Tahoe], In them days hunters just carried little thin rabbit skin blankets. They covered up their front and put their back to the fire. My old grandfather was just laying there when he noticed the fire going down (maybe that wild man did something to the fire). Pretty soon he saw a big shadow. He was pretty scared and just laid there. Pretty soon he felt a hand feeling his feet and in between his toes and up his leg and all around his hole [anus]. Pretty soon it reached his face and tried to put his finger in my grandfather's mouth. My grandfather bit that finger real hard and the wild man yelled and ran away.”

I asked if the wild men still existed and my informant replied: “Sure. They are up there in the mountains. They are pretty smart and you can't see them. But us Washo can hear them talking. We can understand their language. I have thought a lot about it and they should have called some Washo over to Oroville when they caught that fella over there. I read about it in the newspaper when I was younger. I know they had a lot of them California Indians come up there but they couldn't understand him. I'll bet a Washo could have understood him.” I asked if he thought it had been a wild man and he nodded in affirmation.

The “wild man” of course was the now-famous Ishi, the last of the Southern Yana who wandered half starved into a slaughterhouse in Oroville in 1911.

The Coyote And Other Figures

Washo myths contain a number of tales about a bumbling, not very bright, generally malevolent Coyote, who as a companion of Wolf seems to devote a great deal of time to eating Indians and to sexual misadventures.

Modern Washo seem less willing than their forebears to weave Coyote into tales but are no less conscious of his malevolent presence. Peyotists often see visions or dream of Coyote (d'Azevedo and Merriam 1957), and quick asides about Coyote's influence are apt to come up in conversation either as tentative jokes or in seriousness. One tale of a modern occurrence involving Coyote did come my way through the kindness of Warren d'Azevedo. His informant was the brother-in-law of my own informant and, like his kinsman, a semimystic, very conscious of his Indianness and credited by other Washo with powers beyond those of an ordinary man in hunting.

> “I was staying in this shack with the guy who owned it. One night he didn't come home but I kept hearing something walking around that shack. The next morning when that guy came home he was all tired out and there was Coyote tracks all around that shack. I got my gun and told that guy to stay away from me” (d'Azevedo).

The Aɲ, a huge man-eating bird described in Lowie's myth number 13, is no longer alive, but according to several informants the creature's bones or at least the island on which it nested can be seen by people flying over the lake because they are only a bit below the surface. Washo insist that white airplane pilots see the shape of the island daily but keep silent because they

don't want to confirm an Indian story. One day on a trip around Lake Tahoe my Indian companion, a sometime leader among the Washo asked: “If we get that money from our claim do you think one of them archeologist fellas could go down under the water and find that there aɲ bird's skeleton?”

The foregoing paragraphs illustrate the tenacity with which Washo mythology has maintained itself among these people. The entirety of many of the myths is no longer part of the repertoire of every adult Washo, but variations, on-the-spot reconstructions, and the introduction of mythological themes into contemporary stories of a secular nature are definitely part of the oral literature of the Washo.

It is interesting to note that some aspects of Washo mythology appear to have more viability than others. Thus the Water Baby remains an important and vital aspect of modern Washo life, as does the Coyote. The twin weasels have lost much of their appeal, as has the giant Hangawuiwui. The giants of the mountains are acknowledged to be alive today but are seldom referred to, whereas Coyote and Water Baby are almost always mentioned and spoken of as living entities even by the most progressive Washo.

Except for the making of offerings to nature, which may be defined as purely religious, other religious or ritual activities dealing with what we would call the supernatural are so integrated with other aspects of Washo life as to be almost inseparable. Thus in describing the religious activities of the Washo I will proceed through various phases of their life, pointing out the ritual actions which are part of Washo behavior in specific situations.

Curing And Shamanism (2469-2541)

The Washo word da¿man¿li¿ has a wide range of meanings which include almost all people with supernatural powers, including curers of several orders. The terms which they use when discussing the subject in English are somewhat more precise and will be used in this paper.

The Washo make a distinction between curers (2594-96) and Indian doctors. The latter, as will be shown, are true shamans whereas the former are somewhat less powerful. Curers appear to be women who have certain powers revealed to them in dreams. Such persons are usually members of what the Washo describe as a "doctor family." An informant described the activities of such a curer:

> "My mother was a curer. She just smoke and talk. You would meet her on the way to town mebbe and say 'I don't feel good' and she'd just sit down and smoke and talk [pray?] a little and then mebbe tell you what was wrong and what you should do.

> “Along about the first war I got sick and couldn't make no water at all. My mother smoked and then spread ashes all over my belly and talked some and after that I passed a lot of blood and got better.”[5]

Far more important than the curers, however, were the Indian doctors. Such men were never exclusive specialists and were apparently expected to share in the work of hunting and fishing with less gifted men. With the introduction of money by the whites, shamans appear to have approached something like specialization, charging fees of up to twenty dollars a session for their services.

Until the middle 1930's there were a number of shamans among the Washo (Stewart 1944). However, with the introduction of the peyote cult, which among the Washo is concerned with curing, the shaman was superseded. Today only a single Washo practices shamanistic curing. Interestingly enough this man, now seventy-five, was an informant of Lowie's in the 1920's, and at that time Lowie described him as a sophisticated young Washo, somewhat mystic and with shamanistic ambitions (Lowie 1939).

This man, Henry Rupert, spent ten years in the Indian school at the Stewart Agency and after graduation worked for a number of years in a printing plant in Reno. When questioned about the old days he was a fair informant, seldom offering more information than was asked for and clearly enjoying the business of making a white man work for every scrap of information. He was also given to dropping subtle hints and waiting with stolid indifference to see if I had been alert. He did not deny his shamanistic practices but was less than willing to discuss them in detail.

His equipment, he admitted (but refused to show me), consisted of a butterfly-cocoon rattle, an eagle-bone whistle, and a feather headband. “I don't really do nothing but help nature,” he said. When I replied that

only some people know how to help nature he was gratified and smiled. “Oh well, it's all psychological anyway,” he answered, confirming Lowie's description of him as a sophisticate.

He is noted for his rather atypical practice of tending a garden, which consists mostly of fruit trees, and for his open liking for old-fashioned foods, which he collects, including fly grubs and locusts. I was not able to observe his curing procedures, but they were described to me by another informant, a seventy-five-year-old woman, considered one of the most progressive of the residents of Dresslerville.

> “I took my granddaughter to Rupert after the white doctors didn't do nothing for her. He don't doctor in the real old Indian way [a phrase I later learned meant that he did not hold a series of four one-night sessions but only a short ceremony]. He don't give you nothing, just sings and prays and talks over you for a while. He has a rattle and a whistle and a band on his head. After we went to him my granddaughter got well.”

Another informant, the man who was cured by his mother —curiously another graduate of the Stewart School and outwardly a progressive Indian—was a veritable fountain of shamanistic knowledge. His father and maternal uncle were both well-known shamans. Although he insisted that he had no particular power himself, other Indians generally claimed that he had certain hunting medicines which assisted him in taking game. There is little doubt that he believed he had been approached by spirits offering him shamanistic power. His life story was a long recital of ailments and mystic occurrences. The ailments, coupled with his attitude about spiritual power, suggested strongly that his suffering had been due to a rejection of the power offered (Whiting 1950). He supplied the following account about the process of becoming a

shaman.

> “Young fellows sometimes have dreams but usually they don't pay no attention to them. But when you get older and keep having dreams you begin to pay attention. Maybe you see a bear or a rattlesnake or Water Baby or anything. It tell you that you are going to be a doctor. The next morning you go out and bathe and pray. This thing keeps coming [in your dreams]. It may take any form, a skeleton or an animal but you know it's always the same thing as the first time, just taking different shapes.
>
> “These dreams keep coming for four, sometimes eight, years to get you to be a good doctor. But during all this time you don't get no song. But they do give you your water. It tells you some certain place up in the mountains where there is a spring. You mebbe think there isn't no spring there, but there is. Then it tells you where to gather tobacco. Later it will tell you to make a rattle out of cocoon. Mebbe at first you only make a rattle with one cocoon. Later it says for you to add more. Finally it will give you a song. You dream this song. But you don't really remember it. You just begin singing it like you had known it all the time. For a while you may get a new song every year. Sometime you have [pg 370]a dream that tells you how to handle your paraphernalia. Sometime a dream tells you that you have to be all alone in your house. I don't know what happens in there but some of them doctors, I think, go over to visit the dead for a little while.
>
> “After you been dreaming for a long time maybe you try to cure somebody but you don't ask for nothing. You never tell them dreams or what your spirit is but other doctors, they know. If your dreams are right you can cure people and then you can ask for something

> [payment]. The real Indian way was to doctor for four nights. Then he'd lay out all his stuff and give it a drink by sprinkling water on it. Then he'd shake his rattle and sing and touch the patient with his hands. He'd talk to the sickness, like he knew it ... like maybe he was friends to it ... he'd say 'now you behave and don't bother this person no more. If you don't behave I'm gonna take you out and show you to everybody and then you'll be embarrassed!' Then he'd suck at the patient (some of these young doctors suck on a stick with a feather on it that they pointed at the sick person, but the old ones didn't do that), and get out the sickness, it would be a feather or a stone. Sometime that sickness come out and go into the doctor so hard they can't get it out and have to get another doctor to help him. Sometimes it hit them so hard that they defecate. I seen them doctors just fill their pants. If it's real tough they get all stiff and fall over. Sometimes fall right in the fire and their clothes all burn off but it don't burn them none. You can't touch them then or it will kill them. But when they begin to shake a little and that rattle begins to go then you can pick them up. If he can, the doctor will vomit out the sickness. When it's out he puts it in his hand and rubs it with dirt and throws it away toward the north; that kills it."

This recital of the process of becoming a doctor shows clearly the ideal situation, the receiving of powers, unsought, from supernatural sources, the guardian spirit watching over its protégé's career, providing him with the wherewithal in the form of songs, spells, and paraphernalia. In fact, however, it would appear that the process of becoming a shaman was far more a conscious and voluntary act on the part of an individual than would be supposed from the foregoing story.

Doctoring power clearly seems to have remained within

certain families. The informant who gave the foregoing account was himself the son of a woman curer and a famous doctor and the nephew of another doctor. From his childhood he was familiar with the procedures of curing, with stories about dreams, spirit visitations, trips to the afterworld, mysterious and sacred locations. He somewhat proudly admitted that as a boy he “used to shake that rattle” himself. In short, until his shamanistic education was interrupted by white man's schooling, he was a shaman's apprentice.

This view is supported by the statements of other informants: “Of course them people that is from a doctor family, they have dreams and get curing power,” said one rather assimilated woman of about seventy-five. Another informant, a man of sixty, who repeatedly indicated his fear of “power” but at the same time was reputed to be an important curer in the peyote church said: “If you come from a family of dreamers there ain't nothing you can do. You're trapped by it.”

Young shamans appear to have undergone a period of informal apprenticeship under an older doctor. Although there appears to have been no special requirement that a shaman have an assistant, it was not uncommon for a younger man to help out. According to one informant, when Blind Mike, one of the well-known doctors in historic times, was becoming a doctor, his teacher required him to smoke four hand-rolled cigarettes in a row without allowing the smoke to escape from his lungs. This was not considered an exercise in legerdemain but a way to develop the younger man's control over his power.

Each doctor received instruction from his spirit familiar as to what paraphernalia he should gather but there was a great deal of uniformity in the outfits of Washo doctors. The following description is of the kit of my informant's uncle, who practiced until the first decade of this century, and it includes some items clearly postwhite in origin.

> “I don't know what all doctors had but I'll tell you what my old uncle had 'cause I seen it lots of times. [At this point another Indian entered the house, obviously curious, and my informant stopped talking until the visitor left.] He had eagle feathers and magpie feathers. He had a rattle with six or eight cocoons on a stick wrapped in weasel skin and humming bird feathers. He had a tobacco pouch of tree-squirrel hide. He also had a stone. It looked like a big tooth with a cavity in it. He told me how he got that stone. He was walking to town [Genoa, Nevada] one day and he heard something whistle. He kept on walking but it whistled again. So he went looking for what was making that noise and he found that stone setting by a fence post. I heard that stone whistle sometimes when he was doctoring. He also had a tie made out of beadwork. Lots of times a doctor would pay some woman to make him a real fine basket or some bead work because that's what his power told him to do.”

Washo doctors often worked together on “tough” cases. One such was the treatment of what seems to have been an infected elbow by my informant's uncle and Blind Mike. The first step in the process was to blow smoke in a circle around the painful area so that the sickness couldn't move. This was followed by singing, rattling, and sucking until something bright began to come out. It was, according to witnesses, as bright as a star, so bright in fact that even Blind Mike could see it. The bright object proved to be (if we can trust descriptions) the stone and setting of a cheap ring which was removed from the sore arm. It is interesting to note that while this process was successful my informant seemed to consider the cure less than one-hundred-per-cent effective because the woman who was being treated died two years later.

Doctors were privy to a number of secrets which were not common knowledge among most Washo. Such a secret

was the cave reputed to be inside Cave Rock at Lake Tahoe. This cave was a retreat for shamans who went there to commune with their spirits or to secrete a particularly important piece of paraphernalia. The cave could be entered through a narrow opening on the landward side, but most shamans preferred a more dramatic entrance. By standing on a certain rock and singing a special song they were lowered through the water and then lifted into the cave. The last doctor to attempt this was Blind Mike. He was directed to go to the cave in a dream. However, he permitted [pg 371] his wife to accompany him and when she saw him begin to sink into the water she screamed with fear. The rock stopped sinking with Mike only knee deep in the water. Since that time no one has attempted to enter the room. This promontory is the center of Water Baby habitation and is reported to be the upper end of a tunnel which extends under the mountains to Genoa so that Water Babies can move freely from the lake to the valley. The rock also marks the eastern end of a road of white sand reported to cross the lake bottom. On the northwest end of the road was located a bed of plants, probably wild parsnips, which doctors gathered for medicine. The wild parsnip was poisonous but doctors ate it to demonstrate their power. They also chewed it into a paste and spread it on rattlesnake bites.

Another spot familiar to doctors was a mysterious hole in the mountains near Blue Lake. The hole could be located by following a spiraling path of white quartz toward the center. According to the Washo tale, if a man dropped even as much as a hair into this hole it made a great roaring sound. Suzie Dick, a Washo woman, whose claim of being one hundred years' old is borne out by white residents, insists that as a fifteen-year-old girl she went to see this hole and was terrorized by a huge hand which reached up out of the darkness and tried to seize her.

Vaguely known to most Washo but familiar to doctors was a cave situated south and west of Gardnerville where

ready-made grinding stones were to be found. These, depending on the informant, were made by old Indians or were put there by “nature” for the use of the Washo.

Noncurative Use Of Power (2567-2593)

Indian doctors often used their power in spectacular displays, apparently to impress patients. Often these displays were competitive.

In the words of one informant: “Them old doctors used to see who had the most power. They'd stick four or five sticks in the ground, each one farther away than the last one, and see how many they could knock down.” Then, disconcertingly, he added: “You can read about that in Kroeber. He tells about some other Indians who did that but I guess he didn't know the Washo did it too.” This informant considered Professor Kroeber as an authority second only to himself in matters pertaining to Indians.

Divining And Rainmaking (2553-2556, 2566)

There were no doctors with rainmaking power among the Washo. However, anyone, particularly a man deemed to be a leader, might encourage rain during the summer. The rite, which is still observed occasionally by

individuals, consists of soaking a pine-nut cone in water and placing it on the ground in the pine-nut hills. Modern Washo look upon this more as a prayer, but in the past it may have been considered as a spell.

The ancient matriarch Suzie Dick steadfastly insists that less rain falls in the Carson Valley than in neighboring valleys because “nobody is talking to God anymore around here.” While she talked she pointed to the clouds hanging over Washo and Antelope valleys and to the cloudless sky overhead.

Older white residents speak of Indian rainmakers, which is a source of much amusement among the Washo. Until a few years ago an Indian, who still lives in Dresslerville, used to take advantage of the gullibility or generosity of white ranchers by performing “rain dances” on their property in return for handouts of food. The Washo generally frowned on this, but because white men were the victims of the fraud it was considered harmless.

The father of the false rainmaker was a diviner of stolen articles. His method was to sit and smoke until the location of the desired article was revealed to him.

Objects Of Power

Eagle and magpie feathers were considered to be the most powerful items of a shaman's paraphernalia. Doctors are reported to have captured eagles and even to have tried to raise them to obtain feathers (223-231) The tail feathers were the most prized. Eagle feathers were extremely valuable and could be traded for anything including “a woman or a sack of pine-nut flour or

anything worth a lot." Ideally the eagle was tied up until the shaman removed three tail feathers. The doctor then tied a string of beads to the bird's leg and released it as a messenger to the spirits. Description of eagle-down costumes suggest that birds were stripped of many more feathers than the ideal three. In historic times individuals have attempted to contain eagles. One old man in Woodfords is well known for having kept them on cradle-boards for easy transport, but such experiments usually ended in failure. Magpie feathers were considered less powerful than eagle feathers but still were highly prized. Today they are gathered by chance—taken from dead birds on the highway or picked up where they were shed.

In the past, eagle and magpie feathers were important parts of the dress of warriors. Magpie feathers were used to make a feather cap with a single feather suspended from the top. Informants recall their elders' describing eagle feathers' being suspended individually from the upper arms and thighs of particularly powerful warriors.

Modern peyotists have lost none of the traditional Washo feeling about these feathers. The ceremonial fans of road chiefs, believed the only persons capable of handling the immense power, are made of eagle feathers. Other peyotists favor the less powerful but nonetheless potent magpie feather (d'Azevedo and Merriam 1957).

Tobacco, as the foregoing accounts illustrate, played an important part in Washo shamanism. It appears to have been used as an offering to the spirits. In addition it is clear that it was felt to have special power of its own. Today older men smoke sparingly and are often somewhat embarrassed to be offered a cigarette casually during conversation. In prewhite times the tobacco was a native variety gathered and dried by the shaman. Today Bull Durham appears to have replaced the wild variety as "Indian" tobacco. The Indians seemed delighted to see me rolling a cigarette; they acted as if I were mastering what they felt was a particularly Indian art. Bull Durham is also

important in peyote ceremonialism because it is “real Indian tobacco.”

Incense cedar plays an important role in modern peyote meetings. It is dried and thrown into the fire to create a fragment smoke which is considered beneficial. [pg 372] Meeting officials fan it into the atmosphere and “rub” themselves in the smoke to obtain power or purification. This has a connection with traditional Washo ritual, but the relationship is unclear and the aboriginal practices obscure. One group of Washo, which was assigned a special place in the large camp circle formed during the pine-nut dances held at Double Springs Flats in the late nineteenth century, is said to have special rights in connection with cutting cedar. Modern informants do not have a clear picture of what the rights were or what the customs surrounding cedar were. One informant did say that if the cedar “bunch” found anyone else with cedar they would say “you aren't supposed to have that” and would make fun of them. She could offer no further details or explanations.

Sorcery And Witchcraft (2562-2564)

There is no real distinction in the Washo mind between a doctor and a sorcerer or witch. Particularly powerful doctors were able to kill their enemies. One of the most feared bits of paraphernalia was an obsidian point found by a doctor. These large points were not made by Washo and are apparently remnants of some previous cultural occupation in the area. If a Washo finds one point up he carefully knocks it over with a long stick before touching it. These points are called mankillers, but I was unable to learn exactly how they were used. They are still viewed

with a certain amount of awe, and the finding of a large point in a sandpit in Smith Valley was known in Woodfords, fifty miles away.

Sorcery was used to explain the abandonment of an ancient campsite at Dangberg's Hot Springs. This site is a trove of grinding stones, points, and other Washo artifacts. Formerly there were numerous skeletons in the area, according to both Indian and white informants. However, the site has not been occupied in historic times because of the following incident.

> "One winter there was a lot of Washos camped around the hot springs. My old aunt was camped there. There was this northern Washo [from Sierra Valley] came into the camp. Nobody know'd him and nobody would feed him. But my old aunt fed him. But he was mad at them people so he went to Markleville and made a lot of medicine. [Why he went to Markleville is unclear. This is the site of another hot springs, a fact which may figure in the magic used.] After he made medicine for a while he kind of spit on his fingers and pointed at Dangberg Hot Springs. Right where he pointed all the grass got brown; you can still see that line of brown if you know where to look, and a lot of Indians died. Nobody ever went back there. My old aunt she didn't die."

Only one Washo disputed this story. She, a very progressive old woman and sometime Christian, attributed the deaths to an epidemic and "didn't think" the doctor was responsible.

Witchcraft and sorcery among the present-day Washo is a difficult subject to investigate. Even among themselves it is treated with extreme indirection and veiled hints. In discussing the problem with d'Azevedo I found that we were in agreement that a number of killings reported among these people could probably be attributed to

revenge for, or prevention of, antisocial use of power.

One woman, now dead, was described as probably a witch. The wife of the diviner mentioned earlier was considered a powerful and dangerous woman. She was useful to the community because she knew prayers and songs for the pine-nut celebration, but dangerous, particularly if she met you at night. One informant describes the attitude of the rest of the community toward her.

> “She used to come around at night and knock on your door and say she was lost. She came here one night and pounded on the door with her cane but we wouldn't let her in. After she went away my husband rolled up a newspaper and set it on fire and ran it along the inside of the door where she had knocked. I don't know why he did that except we was afraid of her.”

Stewart also reports this attitude toward the same woman (1941, p. 444; 2562).

The woman who told me this story is herself under the shadow of indictment for witchcraft. Curiously enough the same phrase, “I am afraid of her,” serves as an accusation. She and her sister-in-law quarreled over the disposal of her husband's body two years ago. Since that time they have not spoken, and the sister-in-law has been proclaiming her fear.

War Power

The Washo have not engaged in real hostilities with the

Miwok or Maidu for well over a century and Paiute hostilities appear to have taken the form of occasional defensive skirmishes; thus the details of war magic are vague. However, Washo tradition repeatedly mentions a month-long period during which doctors gathered and made medicine against the enemy before launching a campaign. Usually this took place at Woodfords, which was the site of a large earth lodge dance house copied after Miwok structures and described as “where the young mens learned them Miwok dances.” (A second dance house is known to have existed in Sierra Valley; attributed to the Maidu, it fell into disuse after the death of its owner.)

Summary Of Shamanism

Although there appears to be only a single practicing shaman among the Washo today (and he certainly not a practitioner of the old school), it would be a mistake, in my opinion, to claim that Washo shamanism is a thing of the past. Few, if any, Washo over forty have not attended a shamanistic curing ceremony and many have been patients. Even those Indians who have rejected shamanism as old fashioned—or in deference to white attitudes—give one the impression of “protesting too much” in their denial of old beliefs. The woman who took her granddaughter to Rupert, the curer, is among the most progressive of the Washo. She is a nominal Christian, active in an informal way as a representative of her people before white authority, and is most apt to deny supernatural explanations of historic incidents. Nonetheless she has faith in the power of this modern shaman and in the cures reported for the old-time

shamans.

One factor in the decline of the shaman as a principal in curative activities was the rise of the peyote cult in the mid-1930's (Stewart 1944). The cult was introduced by a Paiute who gathered a number of Washo followers. His cult or “way” has since been superseded by a strictly Washo group, following the Teepee Way (d'Azevedo 1957). The Teepee Way is an illustration of the effect an ethnographer can have on the lives of his subjects. A casual remark by an ethnographer that the peyote ceremonies carried out by the Paiute leader were not like those he had seen elsewhere motivated a Washo to drive to Idaho to find out for himself. This trip resulted in the formation of the new cult and the near dissolution of the group headed by the Paiute. Washo peyotism has incorporated much of the curing emphasis of Washo shamanism and much of the symbolism as well. The peyote button is reminiscent of the poison parsnip taken by old-time doctors (d'Azevedo 1957). The powerful eagle feather is reserved for the use of road chiefs just as it was the special symbol of the shaman or powerful warrior. The fans carried by most peyotists are often composed of magpie feathers. Curative peyote meetings are often conducted by a special chief, reputed to have very potent curing powers, who does not conduct the regular peyote meeting. Even in regular meetings one of the main emphases is on curing ailments of both the body and spirit.

Led by an assimilated Washo, known by other Indians as a “white man's Indian,” the shamans brought suit against the peyotists urging they be arrested and their meetings banned. They charged, among other things, that peyote meetings were occasions of sexual license. Such open accusations and the bringing of white men into a strictly Indian matter created a great deal of antagonism toward the shamans among the Washo, whether or not they were committed to peyote.

Peyote curing differs only in detail from shamanistic curing as these two stories may illustrate.

> "Had these gallstones and them white doctors operated and they got a lotta little stones but pretty soon it was back. So I decided to pray. You know whenever an Indian wants to pray the first thing he turns to is water and tobacco. So every night when I went to the john [toilet] I'd roll a cigarette and pray to that Peyote. I'd say, 'I don't want to be sick so you got to help them white doctors. You got to get all those little stones together in one place.' That Peyote is a good medicine. I used to go to meetings and it helped me before. So every night I prayed to the Peyote to get them stones in one place. Then I went to the hospital and they operated and got out the biggest gallstone they ever saw. It would hardly go in a fruit jar. I told that Peyote that the job was too big for it all alone that it should just help them white doctors and get all them stones in one place."

Another informant, mentioned earlier as a peyote chief with special curing power, recounts the events leading up to the death of his former wife of cancer of the kidneys.

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> "Yeah I had a couple of meetings for Onie. I helped her too. Except she would not do the things I told her to do. I made that cancer move around from her back where it hurt a lot. I got it around in front where it didn't hurt her so much. But she wouldn't keep doing the things I told her to do."

These two incidents reveal traditional attitudes transferred into a new framework of curing. In the first place, illness is a corporeal object which can be

manipulated—moved and (if one's power is sufficient) removed. Secondly, peyote is viewed as a manifestation of a spiritual power. The informant with gallstones did not attend meetings to have his ailment cured; rather, he used water and tobacco, traditional adjuncts to shamanistic curing. Moreover he did not take peyote for his illness; he simply prayed to Peyote in a manner very similar to praying to a spirit guardian for assistance.

Other shadows of the shamanistic past seem to lie heavily on the minds of modern Washo peyotists. In his discussion of peyotism, d'Azevedo (1957, pp. 624-626) describes in some detail the attitudes about the assistance or interference that one peyote singer or drummer may receive from another. The statements of his informants, although couched in different terms, are reminiscent of many I heard dealing with competitions between shamans.

For several years peyotists were a powerful factor in the tribal council, and they were not loath to play upon the connection between peyote and poison parsnips in the minds of their cotribalists. The peyote button is considered to be a powerful agent and as such potentially dangerous. Therefore a man who could deal with this agent, just like a shaman who could eat the poison parsnip with impunity, was a man to be listened to and followed.

Despite a belief in and a dependence on shamanistic curing or its latter-day counterpart, the peyote curing session, most Washo are willing patients of white doctors. This suggests that perhaps the old views are disappearing under the scientific certainty of Western medicine. Quite the reverse seems true, however. Every failure of white medicine strengthens the Indians' belief that the real source of curing power is a gift from nature. Every success is attributed to assistance the white men have received from Indians' power. When asked the direct question: “Why aren't there so many Indian doctors

today?" my informant answered: "Well, Indians just don't need all that power today. The white doctors know a lot of things and can cure sickness pretty good. In the old days we didn't know them things so we had to have them real powers." This attitude, that nature provided whatever was necessary for Washo survival, crops up in other contexts which I will discuss later in this paper. Far from disappearing, the old notions seem to be maintaining a strong hold on the minds of the Washo. As the number of active peyotists dwindle (d'Azevedo and Merriam 1957), one gets the impression that the shamanistic forms may again become a more important part of Washo life.

Dreams And Dreamers (2566)

Mentioned almost as frequently as doctors are dreamers, whom the Washo view as distinct from shamans. The so-called antelope shaman and rabbit boss fall into this category rather than that of doctor.

Dreamers were gifted with a power to foretell special classes of events in dreams. All Washo believe dreams are likely to foretell the future, and they are alert to find meanings in any dreams they have. Certain persons, those thought of as “dreamers,” are reported to have special gifts of this nature.

There are apparently no dreamers among the Washo today, in the sense that the term was used in times past. That is, no one is especially singled out as having infallible dreams foretelling certain classes of events. It may be that the breakdown of the band structure, which was related to economic exploitative activity, in effect, forced everyone to dream for himself. In the past, dreamers were particularly important in setting the time and place for activities which were carried out by large groups, such as hunting, fishing, pine-nut gathering, and war. With the disappearance of the last seminomadic bands in the middle 1920's, as well as with the reduced importance of hunting and fishing as group activities, persons having dreams which directed group actions were no longer useful. Today, dreams appear to occur to a number of individuals, and those felt to be of social

significance usually deal with catastrophe or other foreboding subjects. The following stories were told to me by the widow under the shadow of witchcraft. When I asked her if she thought any of her friends would tell me their dreams, she replied: “No I don't think no Washo would tell you their dreams. But I'm not superstitious about them things and I'll tell you these two dreams I had.”

> “One summer I was up at the Lake [Tahoe] with my husband and I had a dream that the gambling house at Dresslerville [a structure known officially as the community center] was on fire. There was kids inside and they was screaming but there wasn't no water. I saw the men all around with buckets but they couldn't do nothing because there wasn't no water. I told my husband about the dream the next morning and he said I should take a bath and pray. That's what we do to keep a bad dream from happening.”

The following winter the community center did in fact burn down. A young Indian in a rage after having an argument with his father hurled a bottle of kerosene against a wood stove. The resulting fire could not be extinguished because the Dresslerville pump was not working. Whether the dream was really a prophecy after the fact I do not know. It is significant in any case that the prophecy appeared in the form of a dream. My informant's second dream foretold the violent death of a young Indian woman. The prophecy came true two years later.

Her statement that other Washo would be reluctant to discuss their dreams was all too true, confirming the importance that dreams play in their daily lives. A number of tangential remarks suggest that the belief that dreams confer advance knowledge of the future and that they confer power is still common among the Washo. One

informant said, in talking about “old-time dreamers”: “Today a lot of people will say they had a dream about something, and act real big. I just tell them they are crazy. They aren't real dreamers. They couldn't have a dream about their girl friend.”

Until very recent times a dream was justification for almost any group activity. The most common motivation for such events as a pine-nut dance, a war party, or a rabbit or antelope drive was usually that “So-and-So had a dream.” An announcement would be made and others would gather for the event.

These dreams are clearly different from the visitations of spirits to prospective shamans, which occurred repeatedly and were kept secret. Dreamers, on the other hand, publicly reported individual dreams. Being a dreamer appears to have been one of the important factors in attaining positions of leadership, informal as such positions were among the Washo. The almost legendary Captain Jim,[6] who was acknowledged as a leader by all the Washo in the late nineteenth century, is considered to have been a dreamer by many of the Washo. Those informants who remember the big times at Double Springs Flat, in which a large number of the Washo of the day participated prior to the pine-nut harvest, usually begin their accounts with the statement that Jim would have a dream and announce the date of the meeting. Various parts of the ceremony were also validated by dreams. It is equally clear that although Jim was an honored leader and had dreaming power he was not considered a doctor.

Negative testimony also indicates the importance of dreaming in Washo life. It is to the advantage of certain individuals to deny the “chieftainship” of Captain Jim; they vehemently deny that he was a dreamer but insist that he was simply a good man who was trusted by the Washo. “That Jim was just a good old guy that everybody obeyed because they liked him and the whole group

selected him. He wasn't no more of a dreamer than I am," is the way one claimant for the Washo chieftainship put it. However, his own claim was based on his relationship to a man who was a rabbit boss and who dreamed when it was time to hunt rabbits.

Clearly the Washo believed and still believe that dreams make one privy to the future and provide important insights on which one can base decisions. The specific uses to which dreams can be put change with the situation. Antelope dreaming is no longer important because there are no antelope. Rabbit dreamers no longer exist because the rabbit drive has lost much of its importance in Washo life. Conversely, dreams dealing with modern problems appear to be taken seriously.

One informant often dreams of snakes and evidences a great fear of them. The Washo view this behavior as a rational response to a real warning and consider the man's caution as good judgment in the face of repeated warnings.

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Ritual Activities

Few, if any, Washo activities do not contain an element which we can describe as religious, supernatural, or magical. This element is most commonly revealed by specifically ritualized behavior carried on while a regular course of action is being taken by a Washo. The following sections will deal with this ritualized behavior and the rationale for it offered by the Washo.

Conception And Contraception

Apparently the Washo have no specific ritual to encourage conception. They are extremely fond of children and desire as many as possible. No Washo has ever heard of, or will admit having heard of, infanticide among the Washo, although they have heard of the practice among other Indians. The birth of an illegitimate child, despite the attitude of whites, is greeted with as much joy as that of a legitimate child.

However, it is believed that conception can be prevented by manipulation of the afterbirth. When the afterbirth is expelled it is wrapped in a piece of deer hide or cloth and buried. It is always placed right side up if a woman desires to continue bearing children. If she wishes not to have children it is buried upside down. If at a later time she wishes to become pregnant, she will turn the earth where the upside-down afterbirth was buried. Informants say that not many people do this any more, mainly because younger women go to the hospital to have their babies, but that many people know how and some may still do it.

Certain Indians are reported to be able to prevent the birth of children without the knowledge of the woman

concerned. This requires the cooperation of a woman who has just had a child and who will give the magician the afterbirth. It is then buried or hidden upside down and the woman concerned will not become pregnant. The method of transferring the influence of the afterbirth from the real mother to the victim was not explained, and in fact the practice was revealed with a good deal of reluctance.

Birth (2178-2293)

Informants report that the baby was not touched, either by the mother or her attendants, until the afterbirth was expelled. The birth and recuperation were carried out in a pit filled with warm ashes. A slow birth was blamed on the belief that the mother had slept too much or been lazy during her pregnancy.

The mother was not allowed to eat salt until the baby's umbilicus dropped off, usually in two or three days. The umbilicus was dried and hung on the right side of the cradleboard to insure that the baby would be right-handed.

The baby's hair was cut about thirty days after its birth. Until that time the mother was not permitted to eat meat or to leave her bed of ashes. However, one of my informants who had borne eight children claimed never to have spent more than two weeks in her lying-in bed. She did insist that “in the old days” women adhered to the traditional thirty-day period.

A pregnant woman was not permitted to eat eggs with double yolks, or double fruit, lest she have twins. No

special action was taken if twins were born, however.

During her confinement a woman was not supposed to rub the sweat from her face. She might dab the sweat off, but to rub it would cause her to be wrinkled in her old age. One informant assured me that this was the truth and pointed to her own relatively unwrinkled face as proof.

When a child loses a milk tooth, it is taken up and thrown into the brush. At that time an admonition is shouted to "some little animal with sharp teeth," that it should exchange the milk tooth for a good permanent one (2295a-2301)

Puberty: Girls (2305-2352)

Aside from the "big times" which will be described later, the girls' puberty dance was the most important ceremonial gathering among the Washo. This custom has survived with tenacity and it is still considered a matter of real concern if for some reason a girl does not have "her dance."

Although much of the activity at a girls' dance is clearly social throughout the occasion, there is a series of ritual actions which must be carried out. The following account is an idealized version of the "old way." Other accounts will describe variations which have developed in the past years.

Certain statements which I make will appear to be at variance with Stewart's Culture Element Distribution Lists. However, I am inclined to think that the absence of

traits in the memory of my own informants represents a pattern of change rather than inaccuracies on the part of earlier investigators. With minor exceptions, differences between statements made today and Stewart's lists take the form of traits marked present in the lists which are unknown to my own informants. Moreover, most of these differences are to be found in the hair-combing and scratching complex and suggest that the taboos on hair combing were abandoned some time between the childhood of his informants, who were in their seventies in 1936, and that of my own informants, who are in their seventies today (1959).

The parents of my informants must not have known or not enforced combing taboos, while the parents of Stewart's informants must have considered them proper and so instructed their children. We can speculate, on this basis, that the taboo on hair combing and scratching was abandoned by the Washo some time in the first half of the century. Whether this can be credited to the influence of the white man or to a continuing pattern of change is a matter for further investigation.

The account of the entire puberty complex which follows was given to me by a seventy-five-year-old Washo woman who is generally consulted whenever a family plans to hold the girls' dance.

> "When a girl is about ten she is told what is going to happen to her. When her first period comes [she is not specially confined] people tell her to be [pg 376]active and not to be lazy. She drinks only warm water. In the old days anything that she gathered anyone could come along and take. She couldn't eat meat or salt but Washo don't think eggs are the same as meat."

(This last statement was in response to direct questions and does not reflect special Washo traits. In fact, all food

appears to have been forbidden for four days.)

The family of the girl immediately prepares as much food as possible to feed the guests. One informant remembers in his youth that a family of a girl eligible for a dance would light a large fire part way up on Job's Peak to announce the event.

The dance itself is carried out at night. Singing and hand-clapping accompany the dancing, which may go on all night. During the dance the girl carries a wand about six or seven feet long. The wand is made of a very light wood, often elderberry, and painted red with a native pigment.

In the past, groups camped about Dresslerville staged their dances at the base of a prominent hill nearby. During the night the girl was required to run to the top of the hill and light four fires; this practice has been discontinued for many years, however, apparently as a result of white accusations that the Indians started range fires and also to avoid attracting curious whites.

About dawn one of the girl's male relatives ran forward and snatched the stick from her. He then ran with it into the hills and hid it in an upright position in some out-of-the-way place.

The elderberry wand is a device used to insure the girl's continued agility and lightness of foot. As long as the hidden stick remains unbroken the girl will remain straight and agile.

After the stick was taken away, an older female relative took a small amount of ash on a whisk of sage, and dusted the nude girl on the head, arms, and legs. This ritual was accompanied by an informal prayer that the girl not suffer pains in her head, arms, or legs. She was told: “I am doing this early in the morning so that you will get up early in the morning and work hard.” The whisk was then thrown into the crowd, along with a gift,

which today is usually a bit of money. Food or beads were apparently used in the past.

After the dusting, a basketful of water was brought forward and the girl was bathed. The basket was then thrown into the crowd. This was considered a high point of the celebration. After she was bathed, a few dabs of native pigment were placed on her chest and face.

The ceremony above was described as the “real way to do it ... the way they did it in the old days.”

The Carson Valley Record Courier reports a puberty dance held in the summer of 1919 in which at least some of these activities were observed (although the reporter thought he was attending a betrothal dance) Some two-hundred Indians were in attendance. There were no fires, only lanterns and flashlights. The participants had taken up a collection and purchased watermelon, ice cream, cake, pie, bread, and meat for the feast. The food was served (to the surprise of the reporter) on a long table with plates. About midnight two girls appeared in the center of the dancing circle carrying long wands.

In 1926 Lowie witnessed a girls' dance near Minden and was obviously unimpressed. The crowd gathered slowly and gradually began to dance. He makes no mention of either the wand or the ash-dusting ritual, nor does he give us details of the feast. The bath was given from a tin can, and he does not report a basket's being thrown (Lowie 1939, pp. 305-308).

One suspects that dances held today are somewhat more elaborate than those of three or four decades ago, possibly as a response to increasing awareness and pride in the fact of Indianness. Certainly every girl expects to have her dance, just as a debutante expects to have a coming-out party. When death in the family made it inadvisable to hold a dance on a girl's first menstrual period, everyone agreed that it was indeed a shame. The girl went through her four-day fast and a small party was

held for her when her second period occurred. One informant insisted that in the “old days” a dance was always held on the occasion of a girl's second period but that this had long since been abandoned (Cartwright, 1952, confirms).

The basket plays an important part in the ceremony and it would be considered improper if there were no basket to be thrown to the crowd. It is best if the basket is well made and can actually hold the ceremonial bath water. If such a basket cannot be obtained, and they are growing rarer as the older basket makers die, the bath is poured from a bucket, but a less fancy basket is still thrown to the crowd. The bath and dusting are now given to the girl while clad in her slip, in deference to white notions of modesty which are strictly observed by the Washo. The painting is carried out only if native pigment is available. The wand is left unpainted unless native pigments are available.

The ritual of seizing and hiding the wand is carried out perfunctorily. During a recent dance the girl's uncle took the wand but simply carried it to the grandmother's house, intending to take it to the mountains later. However, the stick remained with the grandmother, who was somewhat concerned about it. It was kept in an upright position, and she constantly reminded the man that he should take it. He regularly promised that he would, the next time he came to visit, but just as regularly forgot it. It may well be that as an adult and an important peyote chief, he was reluctant to carry out what he considered an old Indian superstition.

There is no indication now that the girls' puberty dance is dying out among the Washo. It may well be changing in form and developing into more of a party. As the number of persons who know white dances increases, these may replace Indian dances. There is some suggestion of this in other ceremonial activities. And of course the fact that future generations of Washo girls will attend integrated

Nevada public schools and associate with white students with different aspirations for approaching adulthood may have important effects on the future of the girls' dance.

Pine-nut flour seems to have taken on an important symbolic role in latter-day dances. We see no mention of this food in 1919 or 1926. Today it might be considered proper to delay holding a dance if it was not possible to get enough pine-nut flour to feed the crowd.

Puberty: Boys (2379-2386, 369-374)

The approaching maturity of a boy cannot be measured in dramatic physiological terms, and puberty is considered to occur about when a boy's voice changes. [pg 377] The ritual for boys is less important than that for girls.

The emphasis for a boy is on his developing ability as a hunter. Although hunting is far less important today than it was even in the recent past, few Washo go through the winter without depending on rabbit or deer for meat. The pursuit of the squirrel, ground squirrel, gopher, and other small game appears to be minimal, but certainly this food is not spurned, if available. One of the common legal conflicts with the white man stems from out-of-season hunting during the winter by Washo men filling out the family larder.

Young boys were encouraged to hunt with bow and arrow as soon as they could. Quite often such training was carried out by an older male relative—a grandfather or an old uncle. Expeditions of old men and young boys after chipmunk and squirrel appear to have been common, freeing able-bodied men for major hunting while the

experienced, but less able, older men instructed the boys.

However, all the game taken by a boy was taboo to his immediate family. This included young deer and does which he might kill. Such game was given to another family, usually related. The boy was also forbidden to eat his own take. The taboo included any fish the boy caught.

When a boy killed a buck deer considered by his father or other male relative to be big enough, he went through a simple ceremony. One informant said that in the old days a boy was required to crawl under the antlers of his kill. His father or older male relative then gave him a bath, and from that time he was considered a man and the taboo on his kill was lifted from himself and his family.

My informant, a mother of four sons now over forty, stated that all her sons had gone through the taboo period and were bathed by their father when they killed their first big buck. Until very recently she received meat from some relatives with a young son who hunted frequently.

Whether or not the young Washo are still observing this taboo and ritual I was unable to determine. However, in certain conservative families it seems probable that at least minimal ritual is observed.

Marriage (2018-2051)

Marriage is entirely a social institution, and no religious elements appear to have entered into it. Traditionally the ceremony, if there was any at all, consisted of a “chief” (respected man) throwing a blanket over the shoulders of a couple at a dance. Ceremonial gatherings, such as the

pine-nut dances and the girls' dances were important in the selection of marriage partners, inasmuch as boys and girls came together at these gatherings to engage in flirtation, affairs, and courtship. Dreamers at the “big times” are reported by informants to have exhorted married couples to be good to each other and not fight (see also Lowie 1939, p. 303).

Death (2389-2453)

No amount of social dislocation or cultural impact alters the constant fact of death. Each generation faces this inevitability. It is less than surprising then that changes in attitudes and rituals surrounding death among the Washo have changed very slowly. The only changes which appear to have developed in Washo death customs are those imposed by direct intervention of the whites or as unavoidable consequences of changes in other aspects of the culture.

In the past, when a person died the house in which he expired was abandoned by his family. Of course, if the death occurred in the spring or summer such abandonment was simple; during these seasons the Washo usually lived in simple brush shelters. A winter death was a more serious matter; it was during this season that the Washo lived in the gal'sdaɲl—a structure made to last through the winter and until the next winter, when it was reoccupied. Valley Washo often made these winter homes of brush or tules. In the foothills and mountains, bark slabs and tree limbs were utilized. If an occupant died, this home must be abandoned and was often burned down, and the immediate family moved to another campsite. Thus a family which suffered no deaths during

the winters might spend several years in a single campground, whereas a less fortunate family might have to move every winter, or even oftener than that.

A few Washo began building simple rectangular board and batten houses in the 1890's. Most of the others continued to live in gal'sdaɲ¿l made of boards and scrap, begged, stolen, or purchased from the lumber mills which were quite numerous in the area at the beginning of the century. In the 1920's, when most of the Washo moved into the “colonies” established for them by the government, the native-style houses were abandoned in favor of the wooden homes built by the government. No longer permitted to move about the country at will, and frankly unwilling to abandon the more comfortable white-style houses, the Washo adjusted their death customs. The most common adjustment was to prepare for an impending death by shifting seriously ill persons into an adjoining structure, often a shack built in the native manner or a shed or lean-to. This structure could be burned down without loss when its inhabitant died.[7]

The Washo viewed this destruction of a house occupied by a dead person as simply preventing his spirit from bothering the living.

Most Washo death customs display a conscious attempt to avoid association with the dead. Barrett reports that cremation was practiced, and the bones placed in a stream to prevent their desecration. However, this appears to have been only one of the disposal customs and is not well remembered by Washo living today. The burning or burying of the personal possessions of the dead was common. Certain prized possessions were interred with the body, which was usually wrapped in a shroud of matting, deerskin, or bearhide and placed in a fissure or cave in the mountains. Although there are a number of locations known by both Indians and local whites as old burying grounds, all my informants agreed that in the “real old days” there was no special cemetery

and that these burial spots have developed since the coming of the white man. This may well have been as a result of direct white interference with native funeral customs and an insistence that Indians concentrate their burials. Some of these sites have become traditional among the Washo.

[pg 378]
The dispute between the widow and the sister mentioned earlier was an argument as to whether the deceased would be buried in one of these sites or in the cemetery at Stewart, Nevada.

A white man who has lived in the area for ninety years, reported that as a boy he often came across caches of belongings of dead Indians in the mountains. Today, prized possessions are either crowded into the casket with the body or burned or secreted in some remote area of the Sierra.

Funeral ceremonies were apparently simple. The body was wrapped and carried into the hills to be interred. Prayers in the form of a short speech were directed toward the dead. “We are burying you because you are dead. It's not because we are mad at you or don't like you. But you are dead. Please don't come back and bother us.”

Widows traditionally cut their hair in mourning, a custom which is still practiced. Stewart reports that mourners painted their faces black. My informants denied this, but one elaborated: “I remember when I was a little girl old Indians who had lost someone would cry a lot and let the tears run down their faces and not wash their faces until they were real dirty and black with fire smoke.” Crying at a funeral was expected and in fact positively sanctioned. At a funeral conducted while I was present the sheriff arrested a drunken Washo who was wailing quite loudly. The Indians were all bitter about this because: “All of us cry at a funeral whether we are drunk or not. That's the way the Washo do it.” (This funeral was that of a murder victim and the sheriff was present because he feared there

might be a reprisal attempt.)

A newspaper report of a funeral in Genoa, Nevada, in the late 1880's records that the Indians had borrowed a wagon from a white man to transport the corpse (that of a well-known Indian woman) to the burying ground. The wagon was followed by a large crowd of weeping mourners.

Modern funerals usually take place under the auspices of a funeral director, and generally services are performed by a Christian minister from the Stewart Indian agency. After the white minister has left, it is usual for an older Indian to approach the casket and repeat the old funeral prayers. The reason for waiting until the minister leaves is to avoid hurting his feelings. My informants said the prayers made the older Indians feel more comfortable. It is usually not necessary to burn the deceased's home, but his belongings are disposed of. There is an increasing tendency to tend graves and put flowers on them. The cemetery at Stewart appears to be well decorated with flowers. Two old Indian graves near Lake Tahoe are regularly visited and jars of flowers placed on them.[8]

When the husband of one of my informants died, following a twelve-year illness spent in a secondary house, she went to visit a daughter living near Lake Tahoe. When she returned to Dresslerville her two sons had torn down the shed and disposed of all their father's possessions. In deference to their mother's rather modern views about funerals, nothing had been placed in the casket.

While I was in Dresslerville an Indian of about forty put the torch to the house in which his mother and father had lived. The house had been unoccupied since their deaths. While the house burned no effort was made to extinguish the fire or to call the fire department. A nearby rancher saw the fire and summoned the fire department, but the Indians refused to tell the firemen how the fire had started. The local newspaper reported it had been burned

to drive away evil spirits. This upset my informants, one of whom said that the sight of the house simply made the man sad. She elaborated that the Washo felt they were helping God wipe out the tracks of a dead person. The Washo claim that after a death there is always a rain or sand storm which wipes out the tracks of the deceased.

After the Washo return home from a funeral, they immediately wash their faces and hands. They would not feel safe in handling food or children until this ritual had been carried out.

The behavior of the dead is a matter of concern for most Washo (2606-2609a). Ideally, the spirit is supposed to go up and to the south where dead Indians are. This land of the dead is guarded by a number of men with bows. Some shamans were able to make the trip to the land of the dead (2541-2544). If they could elude these guards, they were sometimes able to recover the spirit of a recently dead person and return it. If, however, the spirit has partaken of the water of a spring immediately behind the guards, it can never be recovered. The by-now-familiar uncle of my informant once visited the land of the dead and reported that there were lots of Indians there playing games and having a good time. If murder victims were present they were with the celebrants, but the spirits of the killers were segregated and were not having a good time.

Ghosts, however, wander over the land. They are generally malevolent. If they feel they have been badly used in life, or are not properly honored after death, or have not been given the things they wanted when buried, they may wreak vengeance on the living. To prevent this, homes were abandoned, prayers were said, and names of the dead were not used. In discussing a recent murder, one of the most progressive of the Washo was extremely reluctant to give the name of the victim, and, when she finally did, she whispered it. One of the difficulties encountered by government agents when pine-nut lands

were allotted to the Washo was a refusal to name the ancestors on whom the allotment claim was based.

Ghosts are often said to come in the form of whirlwinds or dust devils, and most Washo will avoid looking at a whirlwind. At night, a sudden puff of warm air is thought to be a ghost passing nearby.

[pg 379]

Ritual In Subsistence

Hunting, far more than gathering, appears to have been the focus of much ritual activity. This suggests that for the Washo the importance of ritual may have increased in proportion to the element of chance inherent in the activity undertaken. Gathering was a surety, assuming of course that there was a harvest to gather. With the wide variety of plants available within the Washo territory during the spring, summer, and fall it seems highly unlikely that the failure of one species of plant created a serious problem. This, of course, was not true of the pine nut. A failure of the pine-nut crop was a harbinger of a starvation winter. The gathering of pine nuts, in contrast to the gathering of other plants, was the subject of a great

deal of ritual and, in some degree, of ceremonialism uncommon to most Washo gathering activities. This will be dealt with later in the paper.

Hunting

Deer (1-27).—Deer were hunted in a number of ways. Barrett reports, and old informants confirm, that hunting parties of as many as thirty or forty men were formed in the old days to go to the western slope of the Sierra in pursuit of deer. The large number may have been necessitated by the possibility of meeting hostile Miwok or Maidu. My own informants claimed that these large parties often set fire to the forest to drive the deer into the open, and that the large number of men was needed to cover the escape routes.

More common, apparently, were small groups of five or six men, usually relatives, who went into the deer country together. Their technique was to drive along a single deer run toward one of their number who was considered the best shot. This method was very common after the introduction of firearms, particularly repeating firearms.

Finally, any Washo man might hunt singly. Often groups of five or six men went hunting together but each did his own stalking.

Whatever the technique, hunting magic was an individual affair which did not require any ceremonial activities.

A single hunter, before the days of firearms, often stalked in the antlers and hide of a deer. Washo were often superstitious about using the real antlers and made

artificial sets from manzanita branches. This fear of using real antlers appears related to the treatment which was accorded to the bones of deer. These, once the meat had been completely stripped off, were submerged in a stream to prevent their being eaten by dogs or wild animals. Perhaps the best account of the magic involved in stalking is the following by an aged informant, reputed to have "hunting medicine."

> "We never had no poison arrow for bear or deer but had something just as good. We took red paint and mixed it with marrow from a deer leg and rubbed it on the shaft and point of the arrow. Arrowheads for war were little but those for big game like deer or bear were pretty big."

When I asked my informant the Washo word for this mixture he evaded the question.

> "I don't think they had a word for it. They didn't talk about it, just used it. If you used it you had to carry some medicine to work against it, 'cause if you got a scratch of that mixture and didn't have this other stuff [the counter agent], you was a goner.
>
> "A long time ago one man would hunt. Some of them fellas was superstitious about using real deer horns, so they would make horns of manzanita and then cover up with a deer hide. They'd move along ... taking a long time, just like a deer. That old buck would try to get to the side away from the wind to smell you, but you kept circling around so he wouldn't smell you. Finally you could get real close, maybe only three, four feet ... going around making sounds just like a deer. Sometimes them bucks would really believe you and want to fight and then it was dangerous. When you was close you shot that arrow into the deer right behind the shoulder blade. That way

> when he jumped, the shoulder blade comes back and breaks off the shaft. The man would grab the shaft and suck off the blood. Then he'd make a little fire on a flat stone and when it was hot he'd sweep off the fire and spit that on the stone and it would bubble up and disappear. Then you'd go after the deer and you'd find him laying there with blood bubbling out of his nose just like that blood bubbled on the stone."

Other rituals related to hunting dealt with the loss of hunting luck. To regain one's luck in hunting, a sweat lodge was built, consisting of a temporary brush shelter (688-759).

To insure luck it was common in the old days to bathe and rub the leaves of a certain mountain plant over one's body. Other Washo carried a plant on their persons while hunting, to insure luck. I was unable to get my informant to give me the Washo name of this plant. Certain other special medicines are reported. One man, it is hinted, has a medicine which he rubs on his gun to insure good aim. Old hunters are said to have obtained medicine from the Miwok which would put deer to sleep. Today this medicine is a subject of esoteric humor between my informant and his son-in-law. The latter insists that the bear has a medicine which will put his father-in-law to sleep because he came upon the old man asleep under a tree one day when he should have been hunting. Although the Washo depended on ritual to assist them in hunting, it is clear that they considered a successful hunter the possessor of power beyond simple magic. Like curers or dreamers, certain hunters obviously had been blessed by spirits and were able to outthink and outsmart animals and therefore were particularly good hunters. At least some of the Washo who hunt today attempt to give the impression that their success is based on something more than luck or skill.

Antelope (27a-75).—There are no Washo alive today who

can remember antelope surrounds. It appears that most of the Washo territory was not inhabited by antelope, lying as it does between the northern and [pg 380] southern ranges of the Nevada herds. However, small herds did range in the eastern portion of Washo country, but the appearance of firearms and livestock eliminated the antelope completely in this area. One informant, himself seventy-five, remembers stories about the hunts, told to him by a very old brother-in-law who remembered the antelope songs.

Another informant, generally a good source of hunting information, admitted that he did not know anything about the subject. He had never hunted antelope, nor had his father or uncles.

The signal to hunt was a dream announcing the presence of antelope to a dreamer, who acted as leader of the hunt. The entire process was considered to be magical by this informant who said:

> "There was really no corral. Mebbe just a few piles of brush. The people just danced around and sang, and that kept them antelope there like they was hypnotized. They could keep them right there all night that way. After they held them all night they'd start to slaughter at sunrise. They'd sing: 'We aren't doing this for meanness or for fun but we want you for fine food,' or something like that. I heard the song once but I never learned it all. I wish I had, now."

This informant was certain that the Washo did not expect a person to die as a result of the exercise of antelope charming. He had heard of other tribes which believed this, and he thought it peculiar (Steward 1941: 218-220). This explanation compares favorably with the culture element distribution lists presented by Stewart, which reported none of the traits usually considered as part of

the shaman complex in antelope hunting common among Basin Shoshone and Paiute. (Stewart 1941; Steward 1941.)

Rabbits (92-96).—The pursuit of the jack rabbit appears to have been changing in its importance during the past century. Several informants recall being told in their youth by old men that often only the hides were stripped from rabbits to make blankets, but that most of the meat was discarded because other game was plentiful. However, firearms and agriculture soon put an end to antelope hunting, and the trans-Sierran region, like most of the nation, suffered a steady decline in the number of deer. All informants agree that in their own youth trips to California after deer were necessary because there were almost no deer east of the Sierra. All Indians agree that the deer population in Nevada today is far greater than it was in the early years of this century. The decrease in antelope and deer forced a greater dependence on the jack rabbit as a source of food as well as fur. The communal nature of the rabbit hunt may have made possible a gradual transference of ritual traits from the antelope complex to the rabbit hunt.

Traditionally the Washo drove rabbits into nets, a method common in the Basin. Stewart's notes, taken from informants in their seventies in 1936, make no mention of any supernatural aspect of the rabbit drive. Evening dancing during the rabbit drive was denied. There was, however, a special leader who directed the hunt. In later times these men were credited with dreaming power, as this quotation illustrates: “Jack Wallace would dream where the rabbits were and when it was time for hunting he would send out a call.” The man mentioned was described as the last of the real dreamers. This power made him extremely influential among the Washo, and his descendants are considered among the claimants for the “chieftainship.” There appear to have been formalized prayers which were said before the hunt by a man with power over rabbits.

Today, rabbit hunts are invariably held on Sunday. In the words of one informant: “Nowadays anybody can just say ‘Let's have a hunt this Sunday.’[9] They have to hunt on Sunday because most of the men have jobs during the week.”

The disintegration of the ritualized aspects of rabbit driving is not complete, however, and many Washo prefer to hunt with a certain man who lives in the Indian colony at Carson City. While no one will openly claim that he has supernatural power, it seems clear that his presence is important to other Indians. His role is that of leader or captain who superintends the order and discipline of the line of hunters who today sweep a wide area, armed with shotguns. D'Azevedo, who was fortunate enough to take part in a hunt in 1955, states that prior to the hunt this man withdrew from the group. When he asked what the leader was doing he met evasion, and he concluded that perhaps the man was praying. In the period covered by the memory of my oldest informants, dances were often staged nightly during the rabbit drives. The dancing is invariably described as “just for fun” and probably was more social than religious, but such dancing appears to have been part of other ceremonial or semiceremonial occasions such as the girls' dances, first-fish ceremonies and the pine-nut dances. It seems clear that whatever tendency there was to shift the ritualized aspects of antelope hunting to rabbit drives has been stemmed by a growing dependence of the Washo on wage labor which precludes their response to dream-inspired hunts.

Bear (298, 2558-2561).—Bear hunting appears never to have been a subsistence activity among the Washo. Many informants stoutly deny that bear meat was ever eaten, although bear were hunted. No Washo ever gave a direct answer to the question of why they hunted bear if they didn't eat the meat. Others stated that the bear might be eaten in extreme starvation conditions but was never eaten regularly.

On the other hand, almost all Washo men were able to describe in detail the method of hunting and they obviously enjoyed telling bear-hunting stories. The following story told to me by one of the eldest men in Dresslerville, who claims it was told to him by a very old man, is consistent with the stories told by other informants.

> "There was hardly any Washo who kill bear. But I know this much ... the man who went in there and did it tells me ... bears have their own home in the rocks ... a hole going in the rocks. Go in there naked with a knife or arrow in one hand and burning pitch in other ... light scares him out [the bear], then other men shoot the bear in the mouth with poison arrow [see deer hunting for reference to poison] ... get sick for four or five days, maybe a week. Then the man goes back in. Hardly any Indians could do this.[10] [pg 381]I've heard that they cook it and eat it ... not only here but up north. After they get the rifle they get to killing bears around here but hardly ever hear of dividing up the bear meat."

This last remark appears to be significant as all informants emphasized that Indians shared food equally. Thus a statement made voluntarily that bear meat was not shared suggests different attitudes about bears.

Another informant adds the detail that when the bear left his lair, the companions of the man who entered the den would block the entrance so the bear could not return. The first man to place an arrow in the animal could claim it and get the hide. This informant also added at this point: "It's funny that the fella who went inside was *just an ordinary fella* [emphasis mine]." He also insisted that after a bear was killed the hunting party painted their faces black. Other informants claimed not to know of this or said such painting was done when a mink was killed but they did not know why.

One traditional story (Dangberg) sheds a bit more light on the bear. In this tale a group of Washo were camped near a band of Paiute who challenged the Washo to fight. Instead of fighting, the Washo drove a bear from its den and killed it and thus defeated the Paiute.

I had all but given up the pursuit of information on the bear, being convinced that my informants either honestly did not know any more (the bear having been relatively rare in this area for a good many years) or were unwilling to discuss something of an extremely sacred nature, when a chance remark suggested at least part of the explanation.

A pioneer white resident who had lived in Alpine County, California, for ninety years casually mentioned that every Indian man who was buried during his boyhood was wrapped in a bearskin shroud. This, coupled with an earlier mention of “rough” men having bearskins, suggests that the killing of a bear represented the ultimate in Washo bravery and the possession of the skin conferred extra powers on the owner. The rifle made such acquisitions much less hazardous and in the late nineteenth century it had become common for Indians to own a bearskin cloak, which became their most prized possession and was buried with them.

Stewart's element lists show no evidence of any formalized bear cult among the Washo. However, Smith's notes, which Stewart used, report a bear shaman who impersonated a bear (2558). Certainly the bear was one of the spirits who could give power to a man destined to become a shaman. Bear shamanism is reported only for the Fish Spring Valley Paiute by Steward and for the Tago and Wada Northern Paiute by Stewart. These three groups constitute the only ones having formalized bear ceremonialism of any sort in the Basin. The bear dance and a note about impersonating bears (Steward 1941, pp. 266, 322) suggest that formalized bear ceremonialism came into the Basin from the Rocky Mountains via the

Ute and Bannock. However, Kroeber reports awe of the bear, special euphemisms for them, and ritualized secrecy about hunting them among the Miwok which seem more closely related to Washo behavior. Bear impersonators among the Battle Mountain Paiute were credited with invulnerability in war, which is reminiscent of the use of a bear-hide cloak by Washo “rough men.” Although it is not possible to make any conclusive statement about the role of the bear in the supernatural life of the Washo, it seems clear that the animal is held in special awe and esteem by modern Indians.

Fishing (252a-296)

Fishing appears to be far less subject to ritualization among the Washo than was hunting. Here again there may be a correspondence between the amount of ritual and the degree of certainty involved in obtaining the desired food. The Washo area is rated by Rostlund as being one of the higher fish-producing areas in North America. Certainly the many lakes, streams, and rivers were the source of great amounts of fish every year. Indians who could at most be described as only middle-aged, recount the tremendous numbers of fish which swept up the streams from Lake Tahoe during the spawning season. While the numbers may have varied from year to year, the large number of fish plus the intensive fishing methods employed by the Washo almost guarantee a large catch.

However, d'Azevedo reports that Northern Washo describe some degree of ritualism connected with fishing (d'Azevedo personal communication). Dreamers are said to have predicted the day of the spawning run. Dances

were held and prayers said, suggesting a rather attenuated first-fish ceremony for some of the Washo (2618). Other Washo report “big times,” which included dancing and prayer, during the spring gathering on the lake. However, in the actual catching of fish there was much less ritual.

Some fishermen carried a fishing medicine composed of dried larvae of the *Ephydra hians* (Say), called *kutsavi* by the Paiute (Heizer 1950) and *matsi babaša* by the Washo. These larvae were obtained from the Mono Lake Paiute in trade or as gifts. They were considered good food and are still eaten by some Washo. However, in addition they were credited with having great powers to lure fish and were rubbed on harpoons, hooks, and lines. Perhaps this material was considered a fish medicine because these larvae are said to be generated from the scales of a giant fish. This leviathan is reported to have traveled through all the lakes in the Sierran area looking for a lake large enough in which to live. At Mono Lake it scraped some scales into the water before it left to find a permanent home in Lake Tahoe (Steward 1936). Whether the Washo share this story with the Owens Valley Paiute, I do not know, but Mono Lake, because of its saline water and its lack of any fish life, is thought of with some fear and awe. Today I get the impression that some Washo still keep a bit of this material with their fishing gear, although they are apt to rationalize it as a lure rather than real medicine. It should be remembered that hook-and-line or spear fishing accounted for a much smaller percentage of the total annual take than did trapping, damning, netting, or other communal methods which entailed no ritual.

Miscellaneous Concepts About Hunting And Fishing

A number of ritual activities cluster around hunting and fishing. Perhaps the most important is the requirement that women, particularly menstruating women, avoid the hunting and fishing equipment. If a woman touched such gear the owner would bathe it and pray [pg 382] “I'm giving you a bath to wash away the bad luck.” (2354-2378).

A further restriction placed on menstruating women was that they must not eat meat during their periods. To do so meant bad hunting for the man who killed the game.

The meat from the neck of a deer and the intestinal organs were forbidden to vigorous young people. If a man ate neck meat his aim would be bad (360-368). Neck meat was reserved for children and the old. In actuality it would seem that only the children and the almost decrepit ate such meat. One of my informants who is seventy-five, thus certainly qualifying for old age, has never tasted either neck meat or internal organs. To do so apparently would be an admission of loss of vigour which no Washo oldster wishes to make. Menstruating women today will eat meat purchased from a butcher but refrain from eating venison or other game taken by someone they know, for fear of spoiling his luck. Menstrual taboos also hold today in regard to touching firearms or fishing poles, although at least some Washo women own fishing poles, and in the early part of this century a woman who lives at Carson City was reputed to be a great hunter. In times past, certain women are reported to have made excellent bows but not to have used them.

Stewart reports dances to bring deer which none of my informants remembered. However, even in his time the dances were said to be “mainly for pleasure,” which suggests the sacred nature of such dances has gradually faded out of the consciousness of most modern Washo, particularly as deer hunting has become entirely an individual enterprise and is no longer central to Washo subsistence.

Gathering

As stated earlier, there appears to have been much less ritual involved in gathering activities, perhaps because there was much less chance of failure than in hunting. However, Stewart reports that sometimes dances were held to make seeds grow (2619-2621). Such gatherings appear to be remembered, if at all, by living Washo only as social occasions.

The fall pine-nut dance was clearly part of the ritual of the pine-nut harvest (2617, 2622). The pine nut was central to Washo winter survival, and its production was a matter of extreme concern. Even today the pine-nut harvest becomes a paramount interest among all the Washo during the last part of the summer. Speculations as to its size, wishes for rain, and survey trips into the pine-nut hills become common, and according to one informant: “If we have a couple of bad years somebody will say, ‘We ought to have a pine-nut dance,’ and then we'll have one.”

The following account of the pine-nut dances of the past was given to me by a man, now almost blind, of between seventy-five and eighty. His father claimed to be chief of the Washo through an affinal relationship to the famous Captain Jim, and my informant maintains the claim, stoutly denied by all other Washo except his relatives and admitted by them only when they are forced to depend on his hospitality. The account is one of a well-regulated four-day ceremony of the first fruit. However, it will become apparent as other information is presented that it is a highly idealized version. It is valuable, however, because it includes a number of sacred elements of obvious importance.

> “This prayer[11] fella [Captain Jim] lived at Double Springs all year round. He would have a dream telling him when to have a meeting. He was what you would call a religious man. He would get someone he could trust and send out a long, tanned string of hide with knots in it. For every day until the meeting there was a knot and every day the messenger untied a knot so the people would know how many days they had until the meeting.
>
> “All the men came and hunted for four days, and the women would start gathering pine nut. They would hang up the game to let it dry.
>
> “The prayer wouldn't eat meat during those four days but he could drink cold water, and some lady would cook him pine nut.
>
> “Every night they would have a dance. On the fourth day everybody would bring the food they had and put it in front of the prayer, and then he would pick some man who was fair [just] and the food was divided a little before sunrise. If you have a small family you get less, if you have a big family you get more.[12]
>
> “Then the prayer makes a prayer something like this: ‘Our father I dream that we must take a bath and then paint. Even the childrens ... [we must] wash away the bad habits so we won't get sick from the food we have in front of us!’
>
> “Then everybody go to the river ... no matter if there was a little ice on the water, and take a bath. If they was not near the river they bathed the kids from baskets at Double Springs. The prayer he prayed for pine nut, rabbit, and deer.”

Suzie Dick, an ancient Washo woman who claims to have reached the century mark in 1959, recalls that Captain

Jim was her mother's sister's son and that she called him brother. He was a big man in a figurative if not a literal sense. He wore eagle feathers on his head and arms. He had red trousers made out of a blanket with feathers on the sides of the legs. As she remembers him at these ceremonies: “He would scare you to death.” The assembled Washo brought pine nuts, deer meat, megal [Indian tea], and much other food. Captain Jim prayed and gave a sermon, urging everyone to drink water and avoid liquor, and supervised four nights of dancing.

Judging from the age of these two informants, these meetings, which they claim were attended by all the Washo, were held between 1880 and 1900. Most Washo agree that these large meetings were the way “they did it in the old days.” However, “the old days” appear not to be aboriginal but the late nineteenth century, when the Washo experienced a brief period of semi-unity and prosperity.

Rupert, the psychologically oriented shaman comments, “Hell, them northern Washo didn't come down to Double Springs very much. They got their pine nuts southeast of Reno. Captain Jim he was only a big man to them Carson Valley Washo. He didn't have nothing to say to the northern bunch.”

Despite this, it seems clear that during the last part of the nineteenth century large numbers of Washo from the various areas did, in fact, gather at Double [pg 383] Springs prior to the pine nutting. It seems equally clear that this was distinctly a postwhite phenomenon and that in aboriginal times such gatherings were much smaller.

The essential elements of these pine-nut ceremonies are clear. There was a gathering of a number of bands, usually at the prompting of a dreamer who knew certain prayers and songs which would insure a successful harvest. There was a sharing of food among the celebrants, as well as dancing and ceremonial bathing. Such affairs were held in Sierra Valley and at Double

Springs and probably at a number of other places in the pine-nut hills.

The large celebrations at Double Springs appear to have taken on a distinctly nativistic or revitalistic cast. Informants remember Captain Jim's exhortations to abstain from white man's whiskey, to treat each other as brothers and sisters, to eat Indian food, and to apply themselves to the business of hunting and gathering. He himself refused to wear new white clothing but accepted only used garments. It was during this period that Washo received individual pine-nut allotments based on their traditional picking grounds.

Mooney (1896), whose information on the Washo was filtered through the Paiute, reports the Washo during this period as a shattered remnant of a former society eking out an existence in the dump heaps of white settlements in Nevada. The fact that the Washo did not respond to the Ghost Dance seems in his mind to support his notions about the condition of the tribe. However, among older informants this period is invariably recalled as an almost golden age. Although the implications of movements such as the Ghost Dance were not clear in Mooney's time, it seems more than likely that the Washo failed to join the movement because they were not suffering the social and cultural dislocation of the Paiute, Plains tribes, or California Indians and, in fact, may have been undergoing a process of social unification under Captain Jim. This unification appears to have had its primary symbolization in the ritual activity which surrounded earlier ceremonies concerned with pine-nut harvesting. The use of a hide string to summon people to the meeting appears earlier as a war signal used by a threatened band to entreat other Washo (often not too successfully) to come to their aid.

With the death of Captain Jim, the large gatherings at Double Springs appear to have ceased. In the words of one informant, “When he died all them things like the knotted string and that stuff died with him.”

After his death the pine-nut dances continued to be held in various places in Washo country—Sugar Loaf Mountain, Genoa, and Sierra Valley being the most frequently mentioned. Jim's daughter (or sister's daughter) who was married to the claimant Captain Pete and was the mother of the present claimant, Hank Pete, staged a number of dances around Genoa until her death. This action is of interest in view of the fact that she was considered a dangerous woman and a poisoner. It suggests that there was in fact no clear distinction between doctors and witches or sorcerers. Her knowledge of pine-nut prayers and songs made her essential in the ceremony despite the fear the Washo may have had of her.

Since her death in the early 1940's, pine-nut dances have been less frequent. Only one woman among the Washo is reputed to know all the songs, although I suspect that several others are in possession of this knowledge but refuse to come forth and serve as leaders, in keeping with Washo reluctance to assume responsible roles.

After a number of years without a dance, the custom was revived in the early 1950's at Dresslerville. The dances were staged because previous crops had been poor and it was felt a dance would increase the harvest.

These dances, supervised by the woman who knew the songs, were not considered too successful because both Indian dances and white men's dances were conducted. Indian dances were held outside the community house while younger couples danced in the white manner inside. The prayers, bathing, and dreams played a very minor role, although food was supplied. From the accounts these dances sounded extremely secular with an emphasis on the recreational aspects, particularly dancing. However, the consensus that the ceremonies were not successful because of the introduction of white-style dancing suggests that the Indian dances still retain some of their former sacred character. It was agreed that

a dance might be held today or in the future if the crops were poor. Here again the present economic situation of the Washo tends to limit these affairs to weekends. The impossibility of holding four-day dances however, is not considered serious by most Washo. Several informants stoutly denied that there was any requirement that the dance last four days. They implied that those who insisted on this were simply trying to make it sound more important (note that using the figure four makes something more important). Their accounts report that the dances might last from one or two days to a week during which time games were played, dances held, and the ritual described earlier carried out. However, there is no doubt that the dances were important to the success of the harvest and the well-being of the harvesters. One informant recalls that: “Sometimes them pine nuts was ripe before the dance. If we picked them then [before the dance], we took a bath every day before we started picking but we didn't have to do that after the dance.”

The following incident illustrates the attitude most conservative Washo have toward the pinyon pine. D'Azevedo (personal communication) accompanied an elderly woman to her pine-nut allotment where she discovered that illegal Christmas-tree cutters had topped a number of trees, which she believed destroyed their ability to bear. Her response was of sorrow rather than anger. She sat under her trees for a long time apologizing to her father, from whom she had inherited the plot, and to the spirits of the trees.

There seems to have been little ritual involved in other gathering activities, except for the dances to make the seeds grow mentioned in the element lists (2621). This practice must have been occasional and relatively old, because it is no longer part of the memories of older informants.

Miscellaneous Ritual

Although modern informants do not remember taboos dealing with hair combing and scratching during menstruation, they do recall being warned against combing their hair at night. “My father used to say that if we did it we'd marry out of the tribe. Mike (her husband) used to tell the same thing to our girls but they didn't listen and every one of them married out of the tribe.”

The dried body of a bat, described as having several different kinds of hair (Lowie 1939, p. 332) was a powerful gambling charm. Professional Indian gamblers, who traveled about the country participating in the hand game, often carried one. Bat power was considered extremely dangerous if one did not know how to use it. “My daughter found a bat in a field one day, but an old Indian said that if she didn't know how to treat it, it would eat up her children.” Women especially were afraid of bat-talismans and of living bats. The Washo believe that a bat charm is also a powerful love medicine and that a woman once touched by such a charm is powerless in the hands of its owner. “You touch a woman with that thing and it hypnotizes her. She follow the guy and die if she don't go with him. I don't believe I ever heard of a Washo use one. We'd be too afraid. But them Paiutes and Shoshones use it.”

Except for the painting of a girl during her puberty dance, painting of the face and body had little part in Washo

ritualism, although its social significance may have been important (Lowie 1939, p. 304). However, certain other customs of dress and adornment appear to have had religious significance. Eagle feathers and magpie feathers, as well as a bearskin robe, conferred power. A similar notion may explain the use of the skin of the agile and wise long-tailed weasel as a binding for hair braids.

The hooting of an owl or singing of birds at night was considered as a warning of danger or an omen of death.

Influence Of Christianity

The Washo have been exposed to Christianity from two main sources. Missionary groups have maintained representatives from time to time at one or another of the Washo colonies. A church dominates the appallingly dreary landscape of Dresslerville. Weather and neglect have caused the building to deteriorate. Permanent missionizing efforts apparently have been abandoned. One church group carries on a summer Bible class for children and sewing classes for women. Funerals are generally conducted by a Christian minister, but this appears to be a sop to white opinion rather than the result of any real desire on the part of the Washo to become Christians. At best they seem to have simply incorporated Christian services as another source of

power. It is less than surprising that a people whose main religious emphasis seems to have been on curing or subsistence ritual should have found white doctors useful but white ministers a rather mysterious and superfluous bit of white culture.

The other main source of Christian ideas has been the peyote cult, which includes a roughly Christian version of God and Christ visualized as the father and the brother. The cross, pictures of Christ, and references to Jesus play a role in peyote ceremonialism. Other investigators (d'Azevedo and Merriam 1951; Stewart 1944) have noted a shift toward Indian tradition in the Washo peyote cult, with an attending reduction of Christian ideas. The attitude of one Washo woman sums the question up quite well: “I think them peyote people [she was not a peyotist but had encouraged her son to attend a meeting to cure a back injury] believe more what they doing than the white preacher.” Her own religion is summed up in her actions. In addition to sending her son to peyote meetings, she had taken her granddaughter to the shaman and is a regular attendant at the church sewing school. She was also the person who waited until the minister left the church to repeat ancient funeral prayers.

[pg 385]

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AA: American Anthropologist
BAE: Bureau of American Ethnology
SI-MC: Smithsonian Institution, Miscellaneous Collections
UC: University of California Publications
UC-AR: Anthropological Records
UC-PAAE: American Archaeology and Ethnology

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Footnotes

1. W. L. d'Azevedo, basing his opinions on extensive field work in the area, contends that early estimates of Washo population were incorrect and that modern figures based on these estimates are inaccurate. A contemporary estimate, made by a resident journalist in 1881, was somewhat over 3,000.

2. This statement should not be considered as an indication of matrilineality in Washo society. Freed and d'Azevedo, who have done extensive work in kinship and social organization of this group, seemed to agree that the Washo were loosely bilateral with certain formalized patrilineal elements. However, because of fragile marriages, many Washo have had a longer and closer association with their mothers' families than with their fathers', or with those of any of their mothers' subsequent husbands.

3.

Kluckhohn reports that the payment for joining a coven of Navajo witches is often the life of a relative (1947, p. 131).

4.

This story very closely parallels one recorded by James Hatch among the Yokuts. Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers, No. 19, Fall, 1958.

5.

Regular Indian doctors were forbidden to treat members of their own families, a prohibition which appears not to have extended to a non-shamanistic curer.

6.

Captain Jim is the only Washo whom the Washo generally accept as having been a leader of the entire tribe. Other claimants to the title of chief of the Washo are contemptuously discounted. There were in the past a number of men, usually considered leaders of a “bunch” who were called “captains” or, less often, “chiefs” because they dealt with the white population. The entire institution of captain may well be a post-white development.

7.

The willingness of the Washo to send gravely ill persons to the hospital seems in part motivated by the wish to avoid a death in the house.

8.

The concern for these particular graves may be in part motivated by the fact that they are a focal point in a Washo land claim. Because of California law concerning cemeteries, the Indians contend that the tourist camp presently on the site is there illegally and that the land is theirs. Thus far the camp operator has been enjoined from removing or desecrating the graves, but the Indians' claim has not been

considered.

9. This statement was made to point out to me that in other times only special people, inspired by dreams, would have suggested a rabbit hunt.

10. This kind of a statement was common and whenever it was made suggestions of special power were made explicit later in the conversation, or were implied by the attitude of the informant.

11. Used in an adjectival sense. In the reference below prayer is used nominally.

12. No matter how reluctant aged Washo may have been to discuss other aspects of the past, they became eloquent about any occasion on which food was plentiful. They describe in minute detail the kinds and amount of food at a feast although they cannot remember the time, place, or those present.

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